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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF WINSTON DOOKERAN'S PROSPECTS

REF: A. A. PORT OF SPAIN 00488

[1](#)B. B. PORT OF SPAIN 00253
[1](#)C. C. PORT OF SPAIN 00405

Classified By: A/DCM, AD MILLER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On May 26, Political Chief and Political Officer met for two hours with Robin Montano, the former Opposition United National Congress (UNC) Senator who had been fired earlier in the year by then Opposition Leader Basdeo Panday as part of the internecine strife within the party. Montano is a close confidant of embattled UNC Political Leader Winston Dookeran and sees himself as Dookeran's chief political strategist and image consultant.

[1](#)2. (C) According to Montano, the rift between Dookeran and the Panday supporters on the UNC Executive Council began in July/August of 2005 when UNC financiers, specifically International Soccer Federation (FIFA) Vice President Austin Jack Warner and financial magnate Lawrence Duprey, pressured Panday to give up his leadership role (likely because of impending corruption revelations). Panday agreed to hold elections for the UNC Executive and offered to back Dookeran for the Political Leader slot, expecting Dookeran to decline the offer. However, Dookeran was of a mind to accept the offer, and Montano encouraged him to do so, saying the only chance the UNC would have of defeating the ruling People's National Movement at the next general election was with Dookeran inside the party. As it turned out, although Dookeran was elected unopposed as UNC Political Leader, Panday, who retained the opposition leader spot for himself, refused to grant Dookeran the power to set the party's political agenda, a responsibility assigned to the political leader by the UNC constitution. Instead, Panday worked assiduously to marginalize Dookeran.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Montano, Dookeran's strategy is, for the time being, to stay within the UNC, in spite of the strenuous efforts of what he calls &the cabal8 on the UNC Executive Council to demean him and to distance him from the party's decision-making processes. Montano fully backs this strategy as a means of retaining the support of the traditional UNC heartland of central and south Trinidad. Accordingly, Dookeran has been out campaigning in these areas in an effort to win UNC grassroots voters over to his camp and persuade them that his &brand" of politics is the only one likely to bring the UNC into power. According to Montano, the aim is to gradually raise Dookeran's profile among these voters and highlight his strengths as a man of integrity and new ideas, while gradually separating himself from the entrenched UNC leadership with its legacy of corruption and divisive race-based politics.

[1](#)4. (C) In response, the UNC Executive has recently embarked on a formal procedure apparently aimed at ultimately removing

Dookeran from the party, a move which Montano said he would welcome, as it would make Dookeran a martyr and raise his credibility with that segment of the UNC membership that is increasingly frustrated by the &old politics8 of Panday and his friends on the UNC Executive Council. According to Montano, if and when Dookeran is forced out of the UNC, he will form a new party based on his vision of a &new politics8 and on his policy of inclusion rather than division. Moreover, a Dookeran-led party would be characterized by a collective leadership rather than by a Panday-style cult of personality.

15. (C) COMMENT: Although Panday has been sidelined, following his April 24 conviction for failing to declare a London bank account, it is clear that he still pulls the strings in the UNC and that Dookeran is taking a long walk on a short pier. Since the February 19 "Unity Rally", Dookeran,s overall speaking style has become sharper and more engaging, and his message of unity politics is more persuasive. The new strategy seems to be working, since, by all accounts, the recent public meetings at which Dookeran has spoken have attracted large crowds. However, this apparent support is still soft, and it is not clear if these voters can actually be counted on to move over to Dookeran and abandon their traditional party affiliations. Should Dookeran be ousted from the UNC, a new Dookeran-led party would signal a revolution in T&T politics: a major party built around a platform and a vision rather than around a charismatic leader who appeals to the electors, tribal instincts rather than to any beliefs they may have about how to forge a better society. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN